

## Executive summary

### ACCESS AND EQUITY: REVIEW AND FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Access and Equity reporting remains a valuable strategy for raising awareness of the responsibilities government agencies have in delivering culturally responsive services and monitoring their performance. However, a review of the Access and Equity Strategy by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA)<sup>1</sup> in 2005 found that additional elements, primarily directed at increasing agency engagement and facilitating greater community input, are required for government services to better meet the evolving and complex needs of Australia's diverse communities. A more flexible, partnership-based approach, such as that used recently to address concerns in the Muslim community may be required.

### ACCESS AND EQUITY REPORTING IN 2005

In 2005, Australian Government departments and agencies reported on their performance in implementing the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* (the Charter) against the eleven indicators of the Access and Equity Performance Management Framework. This report notes a gradual improvement in overall performance by agencies, and that more agencies reported compared to previous years.

### Scope of Reporting

Eighty-four departments and agencies provided individual contributions to the 2005 report. A further 13 agencies were consulted in, or provided input to, these contributions. In total, almost 120 agencies were consulted in the production of the report.

### Performance Trends

Agency input was rated as 'not met', 'met', or 'met well' the requirements of each relevant indicator reported. Performance remained steady, with almost all agencies, as in 2004, meeting the minimum reporting requirements for relevant indicators. An analysis of the criteria of met well shows an improvement of 9.4 percentage points, with 61.9 per cent of all indicators reported on by all agencies achieving this rating compared with 52.5 per cent in 2004.

<sup>1</sup> On 27 January 2006, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs became the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA).

Reporting for some agencies, such as the Attorney-General's Department, improved dramatically. The number of agencies (22) meeting all indicators well also increased. Conversely, reports from a small number of agencies indicated a lesser performance in 2005 compared to 2004.

Some of the improvement recorded in 2005 can be attributed to the bilateral support provided by DIMIA. This concentrated on agencies reporting separately for the first time in 2005 and agencies requiring additional assistance to meet the minimum level of reporting.

Key trends in 2005 included:

- Agencies saw their role mostly as service providers, but reported least on their role in ensuring adherence to the Charter in services purchased for delivery on their behalf.
- Agencies generally performed better at activities involving communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse clients, including through translated materials and the use of interpreters, than they did at other activities such as providing accessible avenues for complaint or data collection.
- The Regulator role was the best met in 2005, with 73 per cent of indicators met well, followed by Policy Adviser (42 per cent), Purchaser (29 per cent) and Provider (22 per cent).
- Key service delivery agencies continued to provide strong reports, with almost all showing an improvement in 2005 and with 79 per cent of all indicators for this group of agencies rated as met well.
- Twenty-three agencies reported separately for the first time in 2005. They reported on 71 indicators, mostly relating to the Provider role. Thirty-four of these indicators, or 47.9 per cent, were met well.

### Key Challenges, Areas for Improvement and Future Directions Identified by Agencies

In 2005, for the first time, agencies were asked to report on key challenges, areas for improvement and future directions in implementing the Charter. The majority of agencies provided this information, which should inform their activities, monitoring and reporting in future years. Agencies identified challenges relating to each role of government, including:

- **Policy Adviser role** – adequately identifying and involving particular culturally and linguistically diverse groups and obtaining a sound, evidence-based understanding of the impacts of some policies
- **Regulator role** – adequately responding to the need for tailored information in a range of different languages and properly understanding the impacts of regulation breaches on certain communities

- **Purchaser role** – ensuring compliance with the Charter in third party service delivery and obtaining a full understanding of community needs
- **Provider role** – ensuring adequate communication with communities, maintaining adequate data collections and managing the implications of new technology in meeting community needs.

The challenges identified by agencies largely correlated with the areas of lower performance identified in DIMIA's assessment of agency reports.

## **State, Territory and Local Government**

With the exception of Tasmania, all state and territory governments and 30 local councils (almost twice as many as in 2004) contributed to the 2005 report. This growing network of organisations has helped to establish open lines of communication and exchange of good practice examples across all jurisdictions.

## **Administrative Arrangements**

The 2005 Access and Equity Annual Report uses the administrative arrangements in place prior to the 27 January 2006 release of the Administrative Arrangements Order by the Governor-General. Unless otherwise stated, departments and agencies have been referred to as they were prior to January 2006.